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14 April 1968

Mr. George Carroll
Assistant to the Vice President
Room 119
East Building

Dear George:

Here are our suggested answers to the questions we discussed over the phone on 1 April. (Per our agreement, of your list of six questions we are addressing only 3, 4, 6 and part of 1.)

Question No. 1: "Some commentators have urged that we must abandon our strategy of total military victory in Vietnam. What actually is our strategy in Vietnam?"

Answer (for Vietnamese Strategy): The government of South Vietnam is faced with an urgent double task. First, it must build an independent and viable nation in a land that has suffered through continuous chaos, war and anarchy for more than a quarter of a century, a land subject to almost a century of divisive and repressive colonial rule before its present period of chaos began, and a land that has never before been a nation in the traditional sense of that word. Secondly, while it attempts the difficult task of nation-building, the South Vietnamese Government must simultaneously cope with a savage war of aggression, directed and mounted from Hanoi, and specifically designed to undercut the work of nation-building and prevent it from succeeding. South Vietnam's strategy is dictated by its double task.

In the nation-building field, by the summer of 1967 the Republic of Vietnam had a constitution drafted by an elected Assembly chosen in an election in which over half of South Vietnam's entire adult population took part. In addition to the national elections which caught the prime attention of the foreign press, the South Vietnamese Government had also conducted village and hamlet elections of great political significance. In the fall of 1967, the people of South Vietnam chose a president, vice president and two-chamber legislature in elections held under the terms of their new constitution, elections

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in which, again, more than half of South Vietnam's entire adult population took part. South Vietnam's government now has a claim to legal mandate far better than anything its Hanoi-controlled NLF opposition can offer. This government's present nation-building strategy is to make the newly created national structure and institutions work, to continue and expand this constitutionally-oriented process of political development now in train, and to engage the population, particularly in rural areas, in this process as it develops.

In the field of national defense, the strategy of the Vietnamese government is -- with allied help -- to drive the armed enemy out of the populated areas of South Vietnam, root out the enemy's covert terrorist and subversive political apparatus, and thus protect the people of South Vietnam from the depredations of those in the south who, on Hanoi's orders, are attempting to intimidate the South Vietnamese people and prevent them from building a free nation. In the larger arena, South Vietnam's strategy, and that of its allies, is to conduct military operations that, in conjunction with the political progress achieved behind the shield of these operations, will induce Hanoi to cease its attempt to dictate South Vietnam's political future by force of arms.

Question No. 3: "Why does the United States claim increased control over the countryside and increased security for the population of South Vietnam when the recent Viet Cong/North Vietnamese offensive has shattered that illusion?"

Answer: "Security" and "control" are complicated concepts difficult to define and even more difficult to measure or quantify with precision. (In the strict sense of the word, there is a lack of "security" in parts of virtually every major American city.) The problem inherent in any employment of such concepts as "security" or "control," in the political sense, are compounded when these terms are applied to a land that is the battleground of a war, particularly a war of the kind now being waged in Vietnam.

Neither the United States nor the Government of Vietnam has claimed that there existed in Vietnam the kind of "security" or "control" implied in the phrasing of the above question. No "illusions" were shattered by the recent Viet Cong/North Vietnamese offensive. On the basis of a carefully developed Hamlet Evaluation System designed for use as a management analysis tool in the pacification program, we did believe that as of the

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end of 1967, approximately 67% of the population of South Vietnam lived in areas under allied military protection and subject to at least some form of continuing Saigon government administrative direction. We still believe that was an accurate measure of the pre-Tet situation.

The steady decline over the past two years in the proportion of the Vietnamese population to which the Viet Cong had relatively unrestricted access was one of the basic trends in the struggle that Hanoi recognized, and realized it had to try to reverse at all costs. The Communists' current winter-spring offensive, in which the Tet attacks played a key role, is primarily a major effort on Hanoi's part to reverse these basic trends. This offensive involves, on Hanoi's part, a major gamble and major commitment of heretofore carefully husbanded assets. Hanoi took this gamble because it felt it had to. The actions of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Forces in February 1968, in short, constitute the most impressive kind of testimony to the accuracy of our earlier assessments, not proof of their error.

Question No. 4: "Why don't the South Vietnamese assume their fair share of the burdens in the conduct of the war? Why is the regime in Saigon unwilling or unable to be an effective ally? To what extent has the government of South Vietnam mobilized its resources in the conduct of the war? Why were U.S. troops forced to bear the major burden in the recent VC/NVA offensive?"

Answer: "Fair share" and "effective" are loaded terms difficult to deal with in the manner in which they are employed in the above question. Considering the magnitude of the problems it faces -- including social, political and economic problems with deep historical roots and not susceptible to quick or easy solutions -- and the challenge posed by Hanoi's aggression (which, by deliberate design compounds these problems), the Government of Vietnam's over-all record of achievement has been remarkable and impressive. The outlines of the political and institutional aspects of the government's achievements were sketched above in the answer to Question 1.

As for the burdens assumed by the South Vietnamese in the conduct of the war, in mid-March 1968 South Vietnam had approximately 647,000 men in its regular armed forces (the RVNAF), its Regional Forces (very roughly, the equivalent of activated U.S. National Guard units), and its Popular Forces (a local self-defense force for which there is no U.S. equivalent,

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a fact that in itself underlines the kind of burden the Vietnamese have assumed). South Vietnam carries this organized military establishment on a population base of just over 17 million people. To match this proportionate burden, the U.S. would have to have over 7 million men under arms in our organized military establishment.

On top of their organized military force, the South Vietnamese have about 60,000 men in the National Police, 10,000 in the Police Field Forces, about 41,000 in various irregular components known collectively as Citizens Irregular Defense Groups and about 43,000 armed Revolutionary Development (i. e., pacification) cadre. These various groups collectively include over 150,000 more South Vietnamese who, though not in the formal military establishment, are performing duties directly related to the conduct of the war. More than 825,000 South Vietnamese, in short, are now taking a direct hand in their country's defense and in waging its struggle for survival. To match that input in proportionate terms, the U.S. would have to have almost 9 million people directly engaged in the conduct of the Vietnam war.

In addition to those it has already committed to the struggle, the Government of Vietnam is now in the process of expanding its regular armed forces by an additional 135,000, is already drafting its 19-year olds and is about to begin its call-up of 18-year olds. The South Vietnamese Government has already recalled many discharged reservists to active duty and indefinitely extended the terms of service of all who are now on active duty. Furthermore, the government is now seeking legislative approval for a total mobilization of the whole country and entire population.

The figures on the number of South Vietnamese now taking part in the struggle tell only part of the story of the price the Vietnamese people are paying and have paid to maintain their freedom. Since 1 January 1961 over 55,000 Vietnamese in the organized military forces alone have been killed in action fighting for their country and over 131,000 have been wounded. These figures do not include those in the military establishment killed in the years from 1956, when the war began, through 1960, nor do they include those in groups outside the regular military establishment who gave their lives in defense of their freedom. The comparable U.S. military casualty figures (for the period 1 January 1961 through 12 April 1968) are 21,318 killed and 133,394 wounded. In comparing the U.S. and South Vietnamese figures, however, two things must constantly be kept in mind: first, the South Vietnamese include in their count of wounded only those requiring evacuation to hospital whereas our figure includes not only evacuees but also everyone incurring a battle-related injury, including those whose injuries require only local first aid. Secondly, and most important, South Vietnamese casualties are borne

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by a population less than one-tenth the size of ours. Any way you count it, in short, the burden we are carrying in Vietnam has been far more than proportionately matched by the burden borne by the South Vietnamese themselves.

In a more limited realm, the contention that U.S. troops bore the major burden in the recent VC/NVA offensive is simply not true. Virtually every element of the Vietnamese army was engaged, successfully, in coping with the country-wide series of Communist attacks which began at Tet. To cite two specific instances, where press (including TV) reporting has sometimes given a misleading picture, Vietnamese forces played an important role in the defense and relief of Hue and in the defense of Khe Sanh. During the period 29 January to 1 March 1968, 3,359 RVNAF personnel (alone) were killed in action as compared to 1,858 U.S. military KIA in the same period. 12,567 RVNAF personnel were wounded as compared to 10,011 U.S. (and remember the two different methods employed in counting Vietnamese as opposed to U.S. wounded). These casualty statistics alone give the lie to the claim that the U.S. bore the major burden of coping with the Tet attacks.

Question No. 6: "Is South Vietnam really a democracy?
Does it have democratic institutions such as a free press and
free trade unions?"

Answer: Though it is making impressive progress in the development of constitutional government in the face of extreme difficulties and obstacles (including an externally mounted and directed war of aggression), South Vietnam is not now a democracy in our sense of the word. The South Vietnamese people, however, are not the inheritors of a democratic tradition and institutional system that we claim so naturally as a birthright that we often forget how our own traditions and institutions took centuries to evolve. Our institutions developed in our historical tradition and are both adapted to and an expression of our particular temperament and needs. We should not expect the South Vietnamese people, who have a history much different from ours, who have different needs (particularly in the immediate present), and whose whole philosophical approach to life and politics is not the same as ours, to develop institutional solutions to their political desires slavishly modelled on those we have found most desirable for us.

On the freedom issue, we must not forget that the South Vietnamese Government is waging a bitter war for survival. There is a very active and lively press in South Vietnam. It is subject to some government censorship, but the degree of government censorship to which the South Vietnamese press

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is now subject is not appreciably greater than the censorship to which the British press was subject during the dark hours of World War II when Great Britain was fighting for her very life.

The trade union picture is one of the brighter spots in South Vietnamese political life very imperfectly understood outside of Vietnam. A free trade union movement has existed in South Vietnam for two decades. During this period, and despite the upheavals occasioned by war and frequent political change, the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor (CVT) has established a commendable record of service to its 300,000 members. It has been active in organizing farmers, fishermen and other key groups; it has successfully utilized the machinery of collective bargaining on behalf of such important affiliates as the plantation workers, and it has set up a network of social welfare centers in Saigon and the provinces which provide basic education and medical and child care to its members. As a result the CVT has come to be generally regarded as the most important civilian mass organization in South Vietnam today. The CVT also enjoys considerable prestige abroad, both within the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions, to which it is affiliated, and among important segments of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions with which it has long cooperated.

In order to maintain its independence from government control, the CVT in the past has avoided involvement in political activity and has concentrated on its trade union function. With the promulgation of the South Vietnamese constitution on April 1st 1967 and the resultant development of institutions of representative government, however, the CVT has assumed a more active political role. The CVT amended its own constitution in 1967 to pave the way for such a role and lent support to Senators and Deputies sympathetic to the CVT cause in the fall elections of 1967. Most recently, in the wake of the Communists' Tet offensive, the CVT leadership has taken a leading part in the formation of the National Salvation Front and has adopted a strong stand against Communist attacks on the cities and the working class population. With financial and technical assistance from international labor groups, most notably from the AFL-CIO, the CVT has been in the forefront of refugee relief efforts. With AFL-CIO help, it is planning a new program of service to its members in rural areas, including the establishment of tractor cooperatives for tenant farmers and expansion of the CVT's already successful fertilizer distribution system. The CVT is also planning additional cadre training which will strengthen its provincial organizations and indirectly enable them to assist the peasants in resisting Viet Cong attempts at control.

Because it possesses significant independent grass roots strength, the CVT has at times been the target of various government efforts to weaken

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and control it. Under Diem, these efforts took the form of a government challenge to the numerically large and well organized Tenant Farmers Association. The present South Vietnamese Government has at times arrested and detained important CVT leaders who have played an active trade union role. The most recent such case, which was widely publicized in the United States and abroad, involved the retention in protective custody of CVT leader Vo Van Tai who led a strike of Saigon utility workers in January and who was arrested by the police following the Tet offensive. CVT prestige and influence is such, however, that the release of Tai was effected through international labor pressure and a joint approach to the South Vietnamese Government by the CVT and representatives of the AFL-CIO. Though the South Vietnamese Government sometimes considers the CVT too independent (in itself a healthy sign) and relations between the government and the CVT are not always cordial, the very friction sometimes thus engendered demonstrates the vitality and freedom of South Vietnam's trade union movement. There is every reason to expect that the prestige and influence of South Vietnamese trade unions will continue to grow and that the unions will play an ever more important part in engaging the people of South Vietnam in their own defense and in the evolution of political institutions adapted to their needs.

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Orig - Addressee

- 1 - WH Special Projects *w/orig ref.*
- 1 - VAS/RAC
- 1 - VC Tet Offensive
- 1 - GAC Chrono ✓
- 1 - VAS Chrono

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